

**FUTURITY  
PHILOSOPHY**

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.57125/FP.2023.06.30.05>

**How to cite:** Filipova, M. (2023). Concepts of Morality in the Light of Religious and Philosophical Traditions: A Comparative Analysis. *Futurity Philosophy*, 2(2), 57-70. <https://doi.org/10.57125/FP.2023.06.30.05>

## **Concepts of Morality in the Light of Religious and Philosophical Traditions: A Comparative Analysis**

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**Received:** February 17, 2023 | **Accepted:** June 23, 2023 | **Published:** June 30, 2023

**Abstract:** Moral issues balance between the dogmatism of value constants and functional dynamism in the socio-cultural space. The purpose of the article is to highlight the priority of the paradigm of the moral component, corresponding to a pragmatic approach to interpreting morality in modern society. The blurring of religion or philosophy's dominant influence (while preserving their positions) in moral and ethical issues demonstrates the flexibility of modern socio-cultural development. Such transformations lead to the reorientation of moral issues towards a functional and institutional vector. The research methods focus on the interaction between general scientific analytical elements and philosophical and ideological dimensions of synergy. The study results indicate that in the last five years, publications on moral issues have shown a tendency to maintain parity and interchangeability between religious, philosophical, and scientific anthropological concepts. Morality retains a value load, guided by spiritual criteria (mainly religious). Moral principles accumulate functional dimensions (scientific and philosophical). The scientific discourse states that the balance between the spiritual and functional aspects of moral concepts is maintained, indicating the synchronization of fundamentality and innovation in modern society. Cultural and historical experience (religious "dark ages" or "immorality of science") shows that the significant dominance of one aspect of morality has negatively impacted civilizational development. The scientific novelty implies the need to develop a strategy for correlating the value and functional dimensions of morality to prevent an imbalance of the moral component. Conclusions. The concepts of morality in religious and philosophical

traditions have coexisted throughout human history, alternating the priority of value or functional characteristics. The concepts of morality correspond to the institutional manifestations of the spiritual life of man and society while universalizing moral guidance in a holistic paradigm.

**Keywords:** religious moral values, socio-cultural concept of morality, naturalistic concept of morality, philosophy, ethics, moral standards.

## Introduction

Morality has become an integral part of the civilisational development of mankind, as it has shaped the value constants of the spiritual world. Under such circumstances, the question of the origin of morality and its sources is a priority in the worldview. The spiritual basis of morality did not allow scientific theories to dominate in defining the essence of this phenomenon. Therefore, the concepts of morality are formed on the basis of three fundamental pillars - religion, philosophy and science.

It is worth noting that each of these traditions focuses on specific dimensions of morality. The philosophical section of the concept of morality indicates its main essential elements:

- existential, which positions morality as a fundamental imperative that is the basis of human existence and society;
- socio-cultural, which aims to define the moral and ethical norms inherent in society;
- anthropological, which defines the nature and characteristics of a person's moral and spiritual life;
- ethical, which creates value constants that perform regulatory and normative functions in society.

### *Research Problem*

The research problem is focused on the consideration of the concepts of morality in the context of the dynamics of civilisational progress. The worldview of the world was transformed in accordance with the challenges of time and formed specific moral and spiritual principles. The concepts of morality have actually become a response to the socio-cultural demand for value standards of the spiritual world. At the same time, a change in the conceptual content of the moral cluster always indicates the turbulence of civilisational development in the segment of moral guidelines.

### *Research Focus*

The study focuses on the importance of differentiating between the concepts of moral values and moral guidance in the context of religious, philosophical and scientific traditions. Moral values have an external existential origin and are given to a person or society as an imperative. At the same time, moral guidelines are moral standards interpreted by society, which play a functional role and can be formed from various sources (religious canons, scientific laws, philosophical ideas, etc.). Therefore, when analysing the concepts of morality, it is worth noting the diversity of its functional and institutional nature.

### *Research Aim and Research Questions*

The purpose of this research is to analyse the concepts of morality in the context of modern philosophical, religious and scientific studies. Given the dynamics of the development of the worldview, moral standards are changing in accordance with socio-cultural conditions. At the same time, the

essence of morality remains unchanged and is interpreted by fundamental civilisational elements. The purpose of the article is to highlight the changes in the dominant concept of morality and to reconcile moral concepts in the paradigm of existence.

The key research question is focused on understanding the difference between the practical use of moral standards and the ideological and theoretical essence of morality as a civilisational phenomenon of the spiritual life of man and humanity. In the scientific works analysed in the course of the current study, three main concepts of morality are traced: religious, philosophical and scientific. The author proposes to reveal the format of positioning of each of these concepts in the worldview paradigm.

### **Literature Review/Theoretical Overview**

The topic of morality has always been relevant in the research and works of scientists, religious scholars, sages and artists. In the contemporary scientific discourse, there are enough works that focus on the problem of morality in the modern socio-cultural environment and are mainly institutional and functional. At the same time, the current study focused on works that highlight the value and conceptual dimension of morality. This led to the actual grouping of the works of moral researchers into religious, scientific and philosophical clusters. At the same time, this classification is conditional and has a purely thematic character, since the vast majority of studies point to a synergistic model of moral concepts in modern science. The classical understanding of morality in religious rather than scientific terms is a thing of the past. The current scientific discourse offers a synergy of religious, scientific and philosophical principles when considering the problem of morality.

It is important for a holistic study of morality to highlight the moral principles and standards characteristic of the mid-twentieth century and interpret them in the context of modern socio-cultural conditions (Wallace & Walker, 2021).

Religious works determine the level of correlation between the religious essence of morality and moral standards of civilisational development:

- the evolution of religion and morality, which synchronises the status of religion and morality in the context of socio-cultural change;
- the inclusion of the concept of “soul” in the moral discourse, which is focused on religious canons rather than scientific justification (Ciocan, 2019);
- practical comparisons of “moral activity” in natural, social and religious spaces (Okyere-Manu, Nkansah Morgan & Nwosimiri, 2022);
- formation of the foundations of modern philosophy with a special status of the moral and ethical dimension (Noichl, 2021).

The scientific interpretation of morality is concentrated in the context of naturalistic and cultural-historical concepts in various interpretations:

- the politics of morality and the politics of values (Mourao Permoser, 2019) as a manifestation of the socio-cultural content of morality;
- understanding of the relevance of moral questions and moral habits (Bleazby, 2019) as an algorithm of social behaviour;
- the concept of moral trauma as a result of influence from social (anthropological) activity or cultural and historical experience (Molendijk et al. 2022);
- the concept of moral relativism in a dynamic socio-cultural space (Plakias, 2019);
- the concept of moral realism in the socially oriented scientific picture of the world (McCaffree, 2019);

- implementation of “machine morality” (Tolmeijer et al., 2021) as a new model of social relations.

A separate aspect of moral discourse is formed by the philosophical paradigm, which actualises morality as an element of ethics, a fundamental dimension of social order and spiritual life. Philosophical ethics and axiology play an important role in the dichotomy of morality and immorality, defining the content and essence of these characteristics (Abrams, Conrad Jackson & Gray, 2021). The philosophical and ethical interpretation of the moral dimensions of positive and negative character is more acceptable than the traditional cultural one, in which there is a standard and a corresponding gradation of morality according to its standards.

It is worth noting that similar studies have already been carried out in the scientific discourse. In particular, Ellemers et al. (2019) analysed aspects of moral psychology in a much wider time period (1940-2017). The rationalist model of moral reasoning was studied in the context of 30 years of scientific works by Martí-Vilar, Escrig-Espuig, & Merino-Soto (2023).

Saroglou & Craninx (2021) conducted a systematic review of the literature that examined the elements of religious moral righteousness: authority, loyalty, care, justice. The analysis of scientific research demonstrated the limited consideration of the concept of morality based on one of the existential vectors. A moral paradigm based on one fundamental characteristic (religious or scientific) is doomed to failure in today's dynamic world.

## **Research Methodology**

### *General Background*

The study of the concepts of morality is relevant for contemporary religious, scientific and philosophical thinking due to the growing need to apply moral standards in the process of civilisational development. At the same time, the dominance of the functional cluster of morality requires its new interpretation in the world picture. It is clear that this transformation has caused a change in methodological approaches to the interpretation of the content and form of morality in the modern world. Given that the study analyses religious, scientific and philosophical concepts of morality, the synergistic model has emerged as an effective methodological principle. The traditional dialectical format, which offered a dichotomous opposition between the religious and scientific nature of morality, proved to be inappropriate in the modern pragmatic world, which requires the involvement of all elements that can be useful in the formation of moral standards.

The specifics of the methodological support of the article correlates with the needs of qualitative research and focuses on the selection of the necessary methodological tools to characterise the scientific literature on the development of moral concepts. The main platform for collecting literature was Google Scholar, which concentrated the works of researchers on the problem of morality. The vast majority of works are indexed in the leading scientometric databases - Scopus and Web Of Science, which defines the current study as an attempt to summarise existing views on the problem of morality in the modern world.

The following filters were used in the selection of literature:

- the date of publication of the works is 2019-2023, which is due to the need to study the problem of morality in the context of modern trends in socio-cultural development;
- The number of papers required to conduct a qualitative study was 50, which is typical for this type of research;
- keywords - moral concepts (religious, scientific, philosophical), which comprehensively explore the nature and essence of morality;

- no regional restrictions for a comprehensive study of the modern understanding of morality through the prism of various cultural and ideological positions.

It is worth noting that the study did not include religious and canonical works that are predominantly theological rather than scientific. Therefore, it is noted that this may affect the results due to the elimination of literature with religious (non-scientific) content. At the same time, for scientific discourse, this approach is justified and allows for a more accurate definition of moral standards that are relevant in the socio-cultural rather than cultural and historical context.

The methodological basis of the study is based on the analytical cluster (generalisation, comparison, correlation), which identifies trends in scientific discourse on the concepts of morality in the modern worldview paradigm. A separate element of the methodological arsenal of the study is the use of synergistic principles to determine the format of interaction between the concepts of morality and an attempt to universalise moral standards, taking into account the fundamental principles of morality and the specifics of religious, scientific and philosophical interpretation.

## **Research Results**

Cultural and historical developments are characterised by transformations in the worldview, which leads to changes in the values that are relevant to individuals and society. Initially, morality as a manifestation of the spiritual component of a person was classified as a cluster of mythological and religious interpretation. The Middle Ages formed a powerful religious concept of the essence of morality, based on the synergy of the activity of a higher power (God) and human compliance with these established standards. Modern times offered a scientific and rationalist justification of the concept of morality based on naturalistic and cultural-historical dimensions. Finally, philosophical traditions, starting from antiquity, reduced the essence of morality to the correlation of all existing moral standards and attempted to single out the value-based moral constants (ethical issues) as a priority.

It should be noted that the stages of moral revolutions occurred in unison with the change in the worldview paradigm of civilisational development (Klenk et al., 2022). In today's world of flexibility and relevance, it is difficult to imagine the possibility of a moral revolution. Rather, there will be a transformation of the existing conceptual characteristics of morality under the influence of significant socio-cultural factors (scientific inventions, individual charisma of leaders, etc.). It is noted that the moral paradigm is gradually adapting to socio-cultural threats (Gary, 2022). A feature of such adaptation is the universalisation of morality, which actualises the elements necessary in specific situations (religious, scientific, mental, worldview).

In certain cultural and historical epochs, the issue of morality was clearly correlated with the dominant worldview. In particular, in the Middle Ages, there was no discrepancy between the religious concept of morality and the general religious worldview paradigm. It is clear that in the context of such coordination, the positioning of morality was unalterable and formed clear and defined standards.

The Modern era was characterised by a dichotomy related to the need to reconcile the religious concept of morality (which still retained a fairly powerful position in society) with the scientific interpretation of morality - the naturalistic and socio-historical concepts (which were rapidly gaining status in the worldview paradigm). The ideas of the sociology of morality (Shadnam, Bykov & Prasad, 2021), which systematised the standards of behaviour and the specifics of human spiritual potential, have developed significantly.

A separate milestone in the conceptual understanding of morality was the scientific and anthropological boom, which is characterised by a naturalistic interpretation of the essence of morality.

At that time, the concept of morality was strongly influenced by anthropological, (Ludwig & El-Hani, 2020), biological, biotic (Koplin & Gyngell, 2020), anatomical (Oliveira-Souza & Moll, 2019), and psychological knowledge, which reduced morality to the mechanisms of human body functioning (Dasborough, Hannah & Zhu, 2020). With the development of the humanitarian cluster of anthropological knowledge, philosophy, cultural studies (Haslam et al., 2021), politics (Rhee, Schein & Bastian, 2019), geopolitics (Hickey & Robeyns, 2020), ethics, economics (Capraro & Perc, 2021), sociology, and law (Kurjak et al., 2023) joined this scientific pool.

Kant's desire to logically comprehend the problems of morality had an ambiguous impact on moral and ethical issues. On the one hand, the ordering of moral principles and standards allowed for the creation of a harmonious functional system of morality (which was actually implemented in the social tradition). On the other hand, the immensity of the existential essence of morality left room for doubts about the rationalist justification of morality. Rosen's interpretation of *The Shadow of God* looms over the Kantian harmony of morality in the cultural and historical dimension (Rosen et al., 2022).

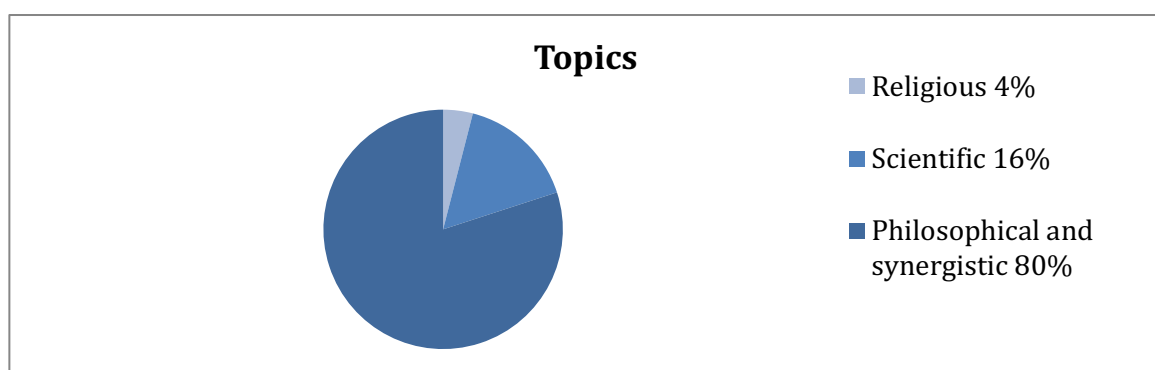
The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have become a unique period in the context of interpreting morality. The already mentioned religious and scientific concepts have been joined by philosophical and mental understandings of morality. Progressive elements were added to traditional moral constants, such as the moral concept of gratitude (Gulliford & Morgan, 2021), the moral and psychological assessment of right and wrong (Watkins, 2020), and responsibility gaps (Santoni de Sio & Mecacci, 2021). Such innovative impulses were in fact a reaction to the socio-cultural pressure exerted on the moral paradigm.

In this period, it is difficult to determine the dominant concept because of the dynamism of socio-cultural development, which leads to the actualisation of all dimensions of the moral cluster. Dynamics generates high rates of intensity of the use of moral standards. Under such conditions, the pragmatic approach is actualised, thanks to which morality becomes a universal phenomenon. The uniqueness lies in the diversity provided by the synergy of religious, scientific and philosophical ideas that form the integral potential of moral standards.

Obviously, scientific discourse has become an arena in which this trend towards the interaction of fundamental concepts of morality is actively reflected. The study analysed 50 scientific papers (published in 2019-2023) on moral issues. The results demonstrate the dominance of a synergistic approach to the issue of the essence of morality (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Correlation of fundamental concepts of morality in modern scientific discourse*



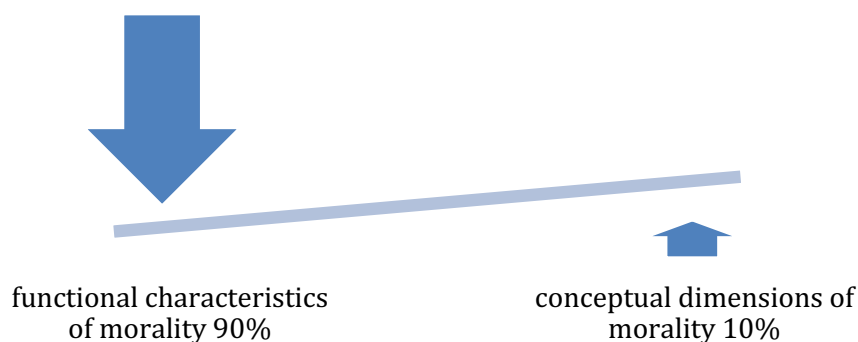
According to the results of the analysis, the lion's share of research on the moral cluster of social development is in the format of coordination or interaction of religious and scientific concepts. These

results indicate a reorientation of moral issues from the value segment to the functional one. This is understandable, since the development of modern civilisation is quite rapid and requires effective flexible levers of a normative and regulatory nature. Morality is one of the fundamental regulators of the social order, so it should be guided by practical means.

Other statistics obtained during the analysis of scientific papers on moral issues are also indicative. The ratio of conceptual and functional characteristics of morality in publications over the past 5 years indicates a clear dominance of the practical functionality of moral standards (Figure 2). For philosophy, this result is obvious because of the intensity of the use of moral standards in the modern world. At the same time, such realities require a new approach to interpreting the principles of morality and forming the principles of spiritual development of civilisation on their basis.

## Figure 2

*The balance of conceptual and functional dimensions of morality in*



An important task of the modern scientific world is to formulate a strategy for the integrity of moral standards. This format is possible under two conditions:

- the existence of fundamental concepts of morality on the part of religion and science as key dimensions of civilisational development;
- creating clear and relevant moral standards that emphasise the effective functionality of the moral paradigm.

The focus of scientific activity on the universalisation and integrity of the moral system has faced a number of difficulties, among which one of the main ones has been the socio-cultural divergence in the issue of unification of moral and ethical norms and principles (Bentahila, Fontaine & Pennequin, 2021).

Contemporary interdisciplinary discourse attempts to reconcile the conceptual dimensions of morality. In this context, a number of problems arise not only with moral elements, but also with the traditional dichotomy of religion with a spiritual dominance and science with a rationalistic basis. Morality, similar to religion, is based on faith and forms a value paradigm. Morality based on rationalistic principles has a practical and functional characteristic.

It is important to note that in each cultural and historical epoch (or at a certain stage of civilisational development), the level of synchronisation of the value and functional components of morality is significantly different. The modern civilisational space is acquiring the features of sustainable development, and as a result, moral concepts are mostly in a state of synergy or at least do not contradict each other. The reason for this positioning of morality in our time is the flexibility of social development. If we compare the conceptual status of morality in the current picture of the world with past cultural and ideological paradigms that have been developing sustainably, we can see a change in

the role of the moral component. Previous epochs determined the dominant element in the moral paradigm (religious, rational, anthropological), which acquired a non-alternative status as a result of the fundamental nature of the worldview.

The asynchronisation of the synergy of moral concepts is also characteristic of periods of socio-cultural turbulence that occur at the turn of cultural and historical epochs or in times of social and historical crises. Under such conditions, moral standards are reoriented to function in a critical mode, so value dimensions often acquire contradictory characteristics in the context of the relationship between the spiritual and the material, the rational and the empirical, etc.

## **Discussion**

Morality has traditionally retained the existential essence of its status in the world picture. However, the dynamics of the present have transformed these ideas about morality, giving it an increasingly pragmatic practical role. Morality is no longer positioned as something that has an external superhuman essence and nature. Nowadays, the model of morality as an element of human life and society with clearly defined standards, principles and rules is more relevant.

In this context, the key contradiction of the modern world can be traced - the predominance of functional and institutional dimensions over the conceptual and value aspects of morality. This problem is obvious, and its overcoming is considered in the context of various scenarios. A key aspect of such realities is the definition of moral concepts that become drivers of moral upgrading.

These concepts are quite actively structured and studied in scientific discourse. They include existential elements: will, faith, consciousness, and reason. It is also possible to use moral standards of a practical and pragmatic nature - legal norms, ethical ideals, value constants.

Freedom and will are existential concepts that acquire a value orientation in the moral context. The results of the study, which note the total advantage of the philosophical and synergistic theme of the study of morality, are only confirmed by the variability of human moral behaviour (Jin, 2023). The goal of synergy is to form a new moral identity based not only on principles but also on functional characteristics (Krettenauer, 2022).

The current study identifies the functional dimensions of morality that dominate the modern worldview. At the same time, previous studies have focused on practical examples of such dominance. Astrachan, Binz Astrachan & Campopiano (2020) emphasise the fundamental change in ethical behaviour in society, with the elimination of the religious component. Family and individual values are orientated (and in fact subordinated) to pragmatic needs. The concept of consumer morality somewhat levels the standard of morality as a factor in the idealisation of spiritual life (Yaprak & Prince, 2019).

It is obvious that the pragmatism of the modern world dictates the formation of a moral paradigm based on efficiency. Result-oriented values become an algorithm that leads to the dominance of the functional dimension of morality, as indicated in the research results. As a result, none of the fundamental concepts of morality is able to meet the pragmatic needs of the modern understanding of morality.

The controversial nature of the concepts of morality in the context of religious, scientific and philosophical traditions is exacerbated by attempts to reduce the principles of morality to a single denominator. This process is not new to scientific discourse and has already been implemented in various socio-cultural interpretations. At the same time, morality is currently facing a very difficult problem of agreeing on its universal standards and principles.

The findings of the current study are consistent with attempts to find a universal tool designed to offset the imbalance of the moral paradigm and prevent the dominance of the functional dimension over the conceptual one. One way to address the moral imbalance is to turn to educational activity (Begum et al., 2022). The educational process usually correlates theoretical and conceptual and practical and functional dimensions quite effectively in the form of a combination of knowledge, skills and abilities. Therefore, education is one of the clusters in which the moral issues of conceptual differences will be reconciled.

The philosophy of education is a factor in balancing the moral and ethical activity of society (Aziz, 2023). A conceptual understanding of moral competence is being formed (Martin, Mörch & Figoli, 2022) - the ability of a person and society to manage the moral and ethical space. The large-scale nature of education makes it possible to build a strategy for global public perception of morality on this platform. Education has been actively used to legitimise moral concepts before. Religious education or the enlightenment rationalist vector of the scientific and educational paradigm - all these formats have represented the moral cluster as a standard of the spiritual life of a person or society.

The study emphasises that the current moral paradigm is permeated with imperfect principles for organising individual, social and global development. Such guidelines are in line with the ideas of double standards that tear apart moral values, which leads to the devaluation of morality in the minds of individuals and in the public consciousness. Therefore, the need for new conceptual characteristics and value orientations of morality is only growing.

Another cluster in which the universalisation of morality is attempted is the legal system (Yılmaz & Geylani, 2023). The legal field is traditionally positioned as a relevant space for moral dimensions. At the same time, the same environment often becomes an arena of misunderstanding, as the word of law and the word of morality are not always identical in life activities.

At the same time, the results of the study contradict the idea that the correlation of religious and scientific interpretations of morality is inappropriate. In particular, Baron (2020), based on the democratic guidelines of our time, notes that concepts such as social liberalism, reflective thinking, and utilitarian judgements are value incompatible with religious moral constants.

It is worth noting that a certain proportion of research on the conceptual understanding of morality has obvious gaps in terms of evidence. It is clear that in religious conceptions of morality, where faith is the basis, such gaps are understandable and are compensated for by the appropriate attitude of individuals and society to moral values. However, for scientific discourse, this situation is threatening in terms of legitimising moral standards. The scientific cluster skilfully disguises such problems with declarative tools, such as integrity ethics (Alzola, Hennig & Romar, 2020), which shifts moral problems directly to the individual (Ekman, 2022). For philosophy, this format is more favourable, as anthropological (and even anthropocentric) moral issues have a better chance of being regulated in the global civilisation order.

The scientific discourse has been enriched by the concept of moral paradoxes associated with the discrepancy between values and the realities of life (Trynyak & Yakymchuk, 2021). Moral harm has also emerged as a new thematic element for researchers of moral concepts (Koenig & Al Zaben, 2021). Innovative terms and approaches play an ambiguous role in shaping the contemporary status of morality. On the one hand, new concepts enrich the moral paradigm; on the other hand, they also cause new controversies.

All these concepts are gradually being integrated into the general paradigm of morality, creating new institutional and functional dimensions. It is worth noting that the expansion of the scope of moral

potential and its increasing intensity in society leads to a revival of discussions between supporters of traditional concepts of morality. At the same time, representatives of the synergistic strategy of the moral paradigm development receive new elements for the development of moral standards.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Thus, the concepts of morality, having passed the test of time and cultural and historical experience, have transformed from fundamental principles to flexible and universal approaches. Traditional religious, scientific and philosophical concepts have gradually been integrated into a common moral paradigm that includes all dimensions of the moral dimension. As a result, modern scientific discourse has begun to actively highlight a synergistic moral paradigm in which various concepts form a common model of moral standard. These realities are the result of socio-cultural conditions that have defined a new role for the moral cluster. The dynamism of civilisational development has led to flexibility in the development of moral concepts, which has resulted in the loss of the dominant status of one of the concepts that was characteristic of previous cultural and historical epochs. Instead, in the modern worldview, morality acquires a more practical meaning, actualising its functional and institutional role in society. Prospects for the study are to develop a strategy for the future format of positioning morality in the world picture while preserving conceptual dimensions and updating its functional potential.

### *Suggestions for future research*

An interdisciplinary discourse is a promising area of research into the concepts of morality, their development and interconnection in the socio-cultural system. In today's world, the format of moral progress (Sauer et al., 2021) is becoming more and more relevant - a continuous, large-scale and intensive transformation of moral principles and standards. In order to maintain this vector of expansion and enrichment of the moral paradigm, socio-cultural tools are needed to provide morality with conceptual, institutional and functional potential. Instead, an interdisciplinary approach (West & Schill, 2022) allows for the interaction of cultural and historical experience and the realities of the present to be intensified in the development of an effective moral paradigm.

At the same time, the present presents new factors that influence the positioning of morality as a fundamental socio-cultural regulator. Technological breakthroughs are creating new formats and statuses for humans, pointing to the need to change the usual moral order (McDermid et al., 2021). The concept of artificial morality resonates with the principles of artificial intelligence (Zoshak & Dew, 2021). At present, the popularity and demand for such a status in society is still quite low, but the example of the progress of artificial intelligence makes us think about the prospects for moral concepts in the future.

Similar prospects for the conceptual transformation of the concept of morality are identified in the potential for the development of neuroscience (Ienca, 2021). Obviously, new discoveries about human consciousness and the psyche can radically change the idea of morality. Today, moral and ethical norms only state the existence of violations or pathologies in human actions, but humanity does not know the mechanisms for preventing such manifestations or the possibilities of suppressing them (Bietti, 2021). If such tools become available to science, the concepts of morality will be enriched with new elements that will qualitatively change the moral paradigm. Neuroscience is already setting precedents for the moral inconsistency of the existing principles of freedom and will in the social order. It is clear that scientific discourse should respond to such innovative challenges and create a new moral paradigm.

## Acknowledgements

None

## Conflict of Interest

None

## Funding

The author received no funding for this research

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